LOI-holders under Special Scheme (Operation Vijay- Kargil), Discretionary Quota Scheme, Corpus Fund Scheme (SCs/STs, widows and unmarried women above 40 years of age without earning parents) and other categories in that order. Permanent CoCos, which are of strategic importance for the OMCs for brand building and training purposes are to be operated permanently by the companies themselves through their own officers. The details of these permanent CoCos is available with Director (Marketing) of OMCs.

LPG connections in Jharkhand

409. SHRI PARIMAL NATHWANI: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Ministry is aware that many districts of Jharkhand like Chatra, Garhwa, Godda, Gumla, Pakour and Palamu have less than 2.5 per cent of households there using LPG; and

(b) whether there is any plan to allot more LPG connections in these districts so that chopping of trees for fuel-wood is arrested?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI DINSHA J. PATEL): (a) and (b) As on 01.10.2008, OMCs were operating 143 LPG distributorships in the State of Jharkhand. Through these distributorships, OMCs are serving about 11.45 lakh LPG customers including 94160 LPG customers in Chatra, Garhwa, Godda, Gumla, Pakour and Palamu district of Jharkhand, covering 21.4% estimated population as on 01.03.2008 in the State. 11 more new LPG distributorships have been planned and advertised in the State of Jharkhand, including 2 in Palamu.

The enrolment of new LPG customers and release of new LPG connections is a continuous process. Public Sector Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) have reported that at present, new LPG connections are available across the counter for genuine domestic customers. OMCs have further reported that they have released 1.035 lakh, 1.033 lakh and 0.247 lakh new LPG connections in the State of Jharkhand during the years 2006-07, 2007-08 and April-September, 2008 respectively.

As on 01.10.2008, OMCs are serving more than one lakh LPG customers of 5 kg cylinders in the State of Jharkhand in order to meet the demand of low-income groups in urban, semi-urban and rural pockets and also extend the reach of LPG to the hilly terrain and interior areas in the country on account of convenience in transportation.

Exploration activities in Saurashtra and Kutch region

410. SHRI VIJAYKUMAR RUPANI:
SHRI NATUJI HALAJI THAKOR:

Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the State Government of Gujarat has requested the Central Government to allocate blocks for exploration of oil and gas to Gujarat State Petroleum Corporation Ltd. (GSPCL) on nomination basis in the areas of Saurashtra and Kutch regions;

(b) whether other national and international companies are not interested in coming to these regions; and

(c) if so, the action taken by Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI DINSHA J. PATEL): (a) Yes, Sir. Under New Exploration Licensing Policy (NELP), launched in 1997, the Government of India adopted international competitive bidding system for offering acreages for exploration and production of oil and gas in the country. NELP has provided a level playing field wherein bids are invited from private and public sector companies-both Indian as well as foreign.

Even National Oil Companies, *viz.* Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC), Oil India Ltd. (OIL) etc. are not awarded blocks on nomination basis as they have to compete with other private/public sector companies under NELP. Therefore, it would not be possible to allocate any block to Gujarat State Petroleum Corporation (GSPC) on nomination basis.

(b) A number of National and International companies are working in the State of Gujarat for exploration of oil and gas including Kutch region.

One onland block in Kutch area namely GK-ON-4 was awarded to M/s Focus Energy in Pre-NELP round.

Five shallow water blocks in Saurashtra-Kutch region were awarded to M/s Reliance and Hardy Exploration and Production in India in Pre-NELP and NELP round.

(c) Government is upgrading the geological data of Kutch-Saurashtra region for bring more blocks to offer in future bidding rounds.

Fall in prices of crude oil

411. SHRI DHARAM PAL SABHARWAL: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the international prices of crude oil has declined during the last four months;

(b) if so, the reasons for not reducing the prices of diesel and petrol as a consequence of decline in crude oil in the country; and

(c) the details of weekly prices of crude oil during the last three months?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI DINSHA J. PATEL): (a) Indian basket of crude oil which touched an all time high of $142.04/bbl on 03/07/2008 has declined since then. The monthly average price of Indian basket of crude oil during the last four months are as under: